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AUTHOR	Killeen, John; Watts, Tony; Kidd, Jenny
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ABSTRACT

Social benefits can be thought of as aggregates of individual benefits, though with possible "snowball" effects. Potential social benefits of career guidance fall into the following two main categories: reducing social exclusion and enhancing social development. Guidance is a way of making the structure of society work, by linking individual needs to societal needs on a voluntary basis. It is a significant lubricant of social development. In relation to social exclusion, guidance has both a preventive role--helping young people to avoid exclusion-- and a reintegrative role of supporting those currently excluded to gain access to education and training and the labor market. Guidance delivers social benefits by enhancing educational participation and achievement; reducing the incidence of long-term unemployment among at-risk groups and improving their access to opportunities commensurate with their abilities and aspirations; providing a gateway to education and work for ethnic minorities exposed to discriminatory employment practices and disadvantaged by spatial concentration in areas of reduced employment opportunity; and avoiding the potential social fall-out of greater labor market flexibility. Hypothetically, guidance helps both individuals in general and categories of individuals at particular risk of social exclusion by exerting a positive effect upon educational and training motivation, participation, effort, and persistence; attainment levels; employment changes; and job quality. (YLB)

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A. Watts

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Social Benefits of Career Guidance

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Much attention in recent years has been given to the economic benefits of career guidance. Guidance also, however, has social benefits. With the Government's current concern to avoid social exclusion, these benefits assume greater policy significance.

This Briefing:

- identifies the social benefits that guidance might yield;
- makes proposals for collecting evidence on such benefits.

The Briefing is based on a small exploratory project carried out for the Careers Services National Association by John Killeen (NICEC and University of Hertfordshire), Tony Watts (NICEC) and Jenny Kidd (Birkbeck College, University of London). The main element of the project was a workshop attended by a number of careers service chief executives and representatives of relevant national organisations.

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CAREERS SERVICES NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
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The Careers Services National Association brings together all the Careers Service organisations in England which deliver statutory careers guidance services under contract to the Government.

NICEC

The National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling is a network organisation initiated and supported by CRAC. It conducts applied research and development work related to guidance in educational institutions and in work and community settings. Its aim is to develop theory, inform policy and enhance practice through staff development, organisation development, curriculum development, consultancy and research.

CRAC

The Careers Research and Advisory Centre is a registered educational charity and independent development agency founded in 1964. Its education and training programmes, publications and sponsored projects provide links between the worlds of education and employment. CRAC has sponsored NICEC since 1975.

Sheraton House, Castle Park, Cambridge CB3 0AX
Tel: 01223-460277 Fax: 01223-311708
E-mail: enquiries@crac.org.uk

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THE NATURE OF SOCIAL BENEFITS

The direct beneficiary of guidance is the individual. Indirect beneficiaries include:

- The family.
- Networks and informal groups such as peer groups.
- Schools, colleges and other education and training providers.
- Employers.
- The local community.
- The nation as a whole.

Social benefits can be thought of as aggregates of individual benefits, though with possible additional "snowball" effects (e.g. transmitted from parents to children, or vice-versa; or along peer networks).

Social effects cannot be wholly separated from educational, psychological and economic effects. The concept of social benefits nonetheless provides a distinctive perspective from which to consider the potential of guidance. In these terms, guidance serves both the general population and also special (sometimes explicitly targeted) groups. In relation to the latter, guidance may be:

- A *remedial* intervention for people who have special needs (e.g. physical and mental disabilities, emotional and behavioural problems) that can pose difficulties in relation to entry/re-entry to the labour market.
- A *rescue* intervention for people who, in part as a result of their own actions, are not yet connected to or have become disconnected from the labour market, and who are trying to escape the situation they are in (e.g. recently-arrived refugees, isolated young single mothers, ex-offenders).
- A *compensatory* intervention for groups, such as ethnic minorities, which suffer systemic disadvantage in education or the labour market due to active or passive discrimination.
- A *crisis* intervention for people in temporary difficulty of a kind which could happen to most people (e.g. unexpected redundancy).

It is however important that the universal applicability of guidance provision is not obscured: guidance is a service to the generality of people in the course of their learning and working lives, *within which* it is necessary to give special consideration to particular at-risk groups.

The potential social benefits of guidance thus fall into two main categories:

- Reducing social exclusion.
- Enhancing social development.

In the latter terms, guidance can be seen as a way of making the structure of society work, by linking individual needs to societal needs on a voluntaristic basis. In this sense, it is a significant lubricant of social development.

REDUCING SOCIAL EXCLUSION

In relation to social exclusion, guidance has both:

- A *preventive* role, helping young people to avoid such exclusion.
- A *reintegrative* role, supporting those currently excluded to gain access to education/training and the labour market.

Social exclusion occurs at three levels:

- At the *individual* level, homelessness, drug abuse, juvenile criminality, negative retreat into single parenthood, and other ways in which individuals are separated from full participation in the life of the community, are all intimately associated with failure and non-participation in education and with chronic separation from the labour market.
- At the *family* level, the transmission of such exclusion commonly occurs between generations.
- At the *community* level, the dynamics of the housing market and of the provision of social housing, coupled with the uneven geographical dispersion of appropriate employment opportunities, are such that high local concentrations of multiple disadvantage occur, adversely affecting the quality of life of all who live in such localities. This general depression of quality of life is often characterised in terms of exposure to crime and vandalism, and the difficulties parents have in protecting their children from immersion in disaffected sub-cultures.

Guidance can contribute to the reduction of social exclusion at all three levels. Guidance services:

- Operate directly to support educational participation and to incorporate individuals into the labour market.
- Operate collaboratively with other agencies to address multiple disadvantage, contributing – and sometimes providing a focal point for – holistic multi-agency approaches to such issues.
- Have a distinctive role to play in local initiatives to address high concentrations of multiple disadvantage and attendant social decay. In particular, guidance agencies can play an important linking role between the development of employment opportunities and local labour supply (without it, substantial economic development can have very limited effects on local employment).

EDUCATIONAL MOTIVATION AND PERFORMANCE

An important role of guidance in combating social exclusion is to enhance educational participation and achievement. Truancy amounting to effective drop-out occurs as early as Key Stage 2, and is increasingly likely during the final years of compulsory education. In many cases, strong domestic and peer forces, or histories of emotional and behavioural disturbance, lie behind this problem. But there are other factors, including:

- Accumulated experience of educational failure.
- Within the horizons of the individuals concerned, the belief that job opportunities and earnings are unconnected to educational participation and attainment.
- The belief that the content of the school curriculum is irrelevant to working life.

Experience of past failure and/or erroneous beliefs about the connections between education and work can persist into adult life, depressing the educational participation and achievement of large numbers of people. In particular, individuals may:

- Lack confidence relative to their abilities.
- Lack knowledge of opportunities at levels of attainment of which they are capable.
- Feel discouraged by the expectation of discriminatory treatment.

Guidance can ameliorate these negative factors by:

- Demonstrating the relevance of formal learning to working life.
- Clarifying the links between education and the achievement of vocational goals.
- Broadening perceptions of the educational routes available.
- Countering disillusionment and expectations of future failure which are over-generalisations from past lack of success.
- Counteracting undue and unrealistic inhibitions on expected attainment and aspiration which may be conservatively related to restricted family "horizons".
- Challenging self- and socially-imposed stereotypes systematically related to class, gender and ethnicity.

- Counteracting peer pressures towards educational non-participation and under-attainment, including, at the peer-group and school levels, working against anti-educational subcultures.
- Preventing "false moves" into forms of education and training which are unrelated to vocational interests and objectives and which make unanticipated demands, such that educational failure occurs – which is then, in itself, an inhibition on future participation.
- Acting as an advocate for individuals who are discriminated against or who are otherwise unable to obtain entry to opportunities within their capacities.
- Providing a feedback mechanism to educational providers on learners' unmet needs.

Employment and unemployment

Another important part of the claim that guidance delivers social benefits rests upon its ability to reduce the incidence of long-term unemployment amongst "at risk" groups and to improve the access of these groups to opportunities commensurate with their abilities and aspirations. These social benefits can be characterised as:

- The self-esteem, sense of purpose, involvement in meaningful activity and social incorporation associated with an occupational role.
- Reduction of the disaffection, alienation and despair associated with long-term unemployment.
- Reduction of the likelihood of adaptation to unemployment as a permanent way of life, with its consequent social damage.
- Enhancement of the probability of entry into challenging opportunities in which further personal development and achievement can occur.

Both being employed at all *and* the quality of the employment are of concern here. In the present political context, the employment of those in, or at risk of, persistent unemployment is receiving particular attention.

Guidance and ethnic minorities

In these respects, guidance has an especially important role in relation to ethnic minorities. These differ in their degree of spatial dispersion or concentration, ownership of businesses, unemployment rates, mean academic achievement, rates of intergenerational social mobility, etc. However, members of ethnic minorities are commonly exposed to discriminatory employment practices and are often doubly disadvantaged by spatial concentration in areas of reduced employment opportunity. Guidance may:

- Help to challenge discrimination in the labour market.
- Raise individuals' aspirations to levels commensurate with their abilities.
- Provide a gateway into education and work.
- Through these means, re-establish communal pride.

In addition, the provision of guidance services may reduce disaffection by symbolising or demonstrating to members of ethnic minorities and to others that the wider community has not "turned its back" upon them.

Guidance and labour market flexibility

Currently, guidance has an especially important role to play in avoiding the potential social fall-out of greater labour market flexibility. Such flexibility is at present viewed by government as a necessary facilitator of economic growth. Its social fall-out may include:

- Raising the probability of unemployment spells.
- Shortening active working life to the point that people are unable to make adequate provision for retirement.
- Confining some groups to under-employment.
- Making it difficult for many families to take on or sustain long-term investments (e.g. house purchase, provision for old age).

The increased stress associated with uncertainty, and the well-documented reduction of psychological well-being brought about by redundancy and unemployment, can contribute to mental and physical ill-health.

Lack of understanding of the new realities can lead to false expectations, lack of preparation, excessive feelings of personal rejection or failure, and forms of fatalism which inflate or exaggerate these adverse consequences. Guidance can:

- Communicate the realities of changing flexible labour markets, preparing people for the challenges they present.
- Help people to manage their own careers in uncertain conditions by enhancing their sense of "control" or "ownership" and by supporting them in adopting an active approach to self-development and to sustaining employability.
- Help people to cope with redundancy, to perceive the skills they have to offer, and to recognise the possibility of skill transfer.
- Introduce people of all ages to possibilities for education and training which can facilitate labour-market mobility as well as directly improving psychological well-being.
- Help people to forge "portfolio careers".
- Help adults to balance the demands of employment and domestic responsibilities by raising awareness of flexible employment options, by promoting them to employers, and by advocacy on the part of particular individuals.

HYPOTHESES

In operational terms, it can be hypothesised that guidance helps *both* individuals in general, *and* categories of individuals at particular risk of social exclusion, by exerting a positive effect upon:

- educational motivation;
- motivation to train;
- participation in education and training;
- effort and persistence in education and training (including school attendance at the compulsory-schooling stage);
- attainment levels;
- labour market attachment;
- employment chances;
- job quality.

The social analysis broadens the range of relevant outcomes beyond the narrow economic, to include:

- the hope and renewed sense of purpose that people say they experience as a result of guidance;
- the sense of "control" or "ownership" that guidance may help to develop or re-establish;
- the renewed self-esteem and psychological well-being which may result.

Guidance may also enable people to find their way to forms of purposeful activity and social involvement other than those which involve income generation. Where people find the means to bring about a better balance between the demands of work and family life, effects on earned income may be negative, but the effects measured by a broader social analysis are more likely to be positive.

At the communal level, it can be hypothesised that guidance has the effects outlined above not only in general, but in economically and socially deprived communities in particular.

RECOMMENDATION

A strong *a priori* case can be made for the contention that guidance has beneficial social effects, of the kinds outlined here. But robust evidence for these effects is likely to be difficult to find. Reasons include:

- Ethical and methodological difficulties in maintaining "no guidance" control groups over the long period during which guidance might exert its effects.
- Lack of realism about the scale of effects which might reasonably be expected (and which would be sufficient to justify the modest level of public investment currently made in guidance).

In addition, there are insufficient studies which focus on:

- Clients at particular risk of social exclusion.
- The kinds of effects which a reasonably comprehensive approach to social benefits both for these groups and for the general population would require.

It is accordingly recommended that a modest review of the existing evidence be carried out, based mainly upon reconsideration of readily assessible sources, plus a preliminary inspection of the literature on such areas as urban regeneration, community studies and youth studies. This would have the merit of making the existing evidence available to a wide audience, and indicating areas where further research might fruitfully be mounted.

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